

# Was Christ Alone on the Cross?

by Michael Meszaros

Was Christ alone on the cross? Many of us have been taught that He was. I believe that the Bible says that Jesus was not alone on the cross. The following walks through a number of scriptures on the topic to explore what happened.

Let's start with the verse that people quote as saying that Jesus was alone. Both Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 say the following (all references are from the New King James Version):

"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'"

The words "Why have You forsaken Me" have been interpreted to mean that God the Father left His son Jesus. I would like to show how this interpretation is inconsistent with other parts of the Bible and then would like to suggest another interpretation.

## Point 1

As a backdrop, consider that Jesus did not say, "Father, where are you?" Instead, Jesus is talking to the Father and says "Why have You forsaken Me?" In John 11:42, Jesus said to the Father, "I know that you always hear me". So, Jesus knows the Father is there listening.

## Point 2

How do we know that the Father was there with him?

The words "Why have You forsaken Me" were not Jesus' last words. According to Matthew 27:50 and Mark 15:37, "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit." Luke 23:46 elaborates on what He said when yielding up His spirit: "And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last."

Clearly, the Father was there with Jesus, receiving Jesus' spirit. Jesus knowing this committed His spirit to Him. If the Father had left Jesus, for whatever reason, that reason would still be in effect the few moments later when Jesus gave Him His spirit. On the contrary, the Father was there to receive His spirit, as Jesus said, and the Father was there listening when Jesus queried Him earlier.

## Point 3

Does the word "forsake" plainly mean "to leave"?

If someone said they would be "picking up" your friend, would "picking up" mean they would be lifting them off the floor? In our culture, we know that it is more likely to mean they will drive their car over to their house and give them a ride. Similarly, the

crowd around the cross would have understood the idioms of the day. To verify what we think Jesus was saying, consider how the crowd responded.

Note they did not respond with, "Look, even Eli has left him." Or, "There's no hope for Him now." These may have been natural responses if "forsake" meant "leave". Instead, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah! Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him." (Mt.27:47-49) The crowd understood that Jesus' cry was a call for help, not of hopelessness such as abandonment, and they felt that the one Jesus was calling to was listening. So, Jesus words do not suggest that the Father was not there.

Another example of someone who had a very close relationship with God, was Moses since God spoke with Moses face to face (Numbers 12:8). Moses, similar to Jesus, also had a crisis point. At his crisis, he said to God, "why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me?" (Numbers 11:11)

Without considering the idioms of the language or the context of the response, one would assume that Moses cry meant that Moses had lost favor. On the contrary, in verse 16, God responds to Moses right away by helping Moses and relieving his pressure. So, Moses' words "not found favor" did not mean Moses had lost favour. They were simply an expression of extreme stress and a cry for help.

Applying this to Jesus, considering the extreme stress He was under, combined with the response from the crowd and other verses from Psalm 22 and John 16 (discussed later), the word "forsake" does not mean "God left". It was a cry for help out of agony, asking for an immediate response from God.

What was God's response? God's response may have been, "Yes, I will help you by shortening your time on the cross" since Jesus' very next cry was giving up the ghost to the Father. Also note Pilate's surprise at Jesus' early death; since Pilate had much experience with how long people can normally survive after being flogged and crucified. Though we don't know exactly what the Father said, we do know from other Bible verses (discussed later) that the Father did respond and we can see that Jesus did not have to be in pain for very long after His cry to the Father.

So, to assume the words "to forsake" mean "to leave", would be to take those words out of context of the surrounding events.

#### Point 4

There is a claim that the Father could not look on Jesus because Jesus was bearing the sin of the world. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says:

"For He [the Father] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us..."

John the Baptist called Jesus the lamb of God, referring to Jesus as the sacrifice for man's sin.

John 1:29 "John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

So, yes, Jesus bore the sin of mankind; however, to assume that the Father could not look on Jesus is inconsistent with the rest of scripture.

If we review where the animal sacrifices for sin were made, we find they were made in front of God.

Leviticus 17:3-5 says "...bring it [ox, lamb or goat] to the door of the tabernacle of meeting to offer an offering to the LORD before the tabernacle of the LORD..."

Isaiah 56:7 "...Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."

Not only does God not hide His face from sacrifices for sin, but He actually requires them to be offered in His holy presence (Lev.17:3-5). Since Jesus' death was a sacrifice for sin, it was a holy offering required to be offered before the presence of a holy God.

Remember that Jesus did not sin. Jesus was a sacrifice for our sin.

Does sin as an identity of itself separate us from God? Consider Adam and Eve. After they sinned, was God unable to talk with them because their sin separated Him away? No, God came looking for them, though they had sinned, and He told them face to face their judgment. Then they were separated. It's God's judgment that brings separation. Because Jesus did not sin, there was no judgment of separation.

#### Point 5

The following is another passage that shows that the act of bearing mankind's sin was something to be done in the presence of the Father.

Hebrews 9:11-12 says "But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."

Jesus on the cross was our High Priest. Hebrews says Jesus entered the Most Holy Place through the offering of His own blood. The Most Holy Place was where God's presence was.

#### Point 6

The following also shows that Jesus died right in front of the Father.

Between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle was a veil to separate them (Exodus 26:33). In the following passage, Hebrews says that Jesus' body was that veil.

Hebrews 10:19 - 20 says "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh..."

Matthew 27:50 - 51 says:

"And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom"

God spoke to Moses face to face from off the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place (Numbers 7:89, Exodus 26:34). So, Jesus' body, the veil, was right before the face of the Father.

### Point 7

Because Jesus was a man, did that mean He was separate from the Father?

John 14:9 says "Jesus said to him, '... He who has seen Me has seen the Father'; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Jesus and the Father were not separate though Jesus had flesh in the likeness of man.

### Point 8

Jesus Himself said that the Father would not leave Him on the cross:

John 16:32 "Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."

The specific context for this statement is in reference to Jesus' trial and crucifixion. So, Jesus Himself said he would not be alone.

### Point 9

Matthew 27:35 states that Psalm 22 was a prophecy about Jesus' death.

Psalm 22:16-18 says: "...They pierced My hands and My feet ...They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots."

Matthew 27:35 says: "Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: 'They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.'"

Within the context of Psalm 22 being a prophecy about Jesus' death, the first verse of the Psalm reads:

Psalm 22:1 "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning?"

This is the key to what Jesus was saying. Jesus was saying "why are You so far from *helping* Me?" just like the prophet said. This is very different from the interpretation of "why are You so far away from Me?"

So, the Father was right there; yet if the Father loved His son and was right there, how could the Father not prevent such agony come upon His son? Jesus' words strike at the contrast in God's character. The contrast between God's goodness to those who love Him and yet how He sacrifices those He loves to reach His lost ones.

Here is God's goodness expressed:

1 John 4: 8 "... God is love."

Exodus 34:6 "And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, ... abounding in goodness ..."

Numbers 6:22-30: "And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them: "The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace."' "So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them."

Or, similarly, James 1:17:

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."

Yet, the following is the contrast. Isaiah 53:10, speaking of Jesus, says:

"Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand."

Or similarly, in Luke 11:49:

"Therefore the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute...'"

Was it painful for Jesus to be bruised? Absolutely. Just thinking about it was painful. After Jesus said, "Father, ...not My will, but Yours, be done", the Bible says "His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." (Luke 22:42-44)

So, God, who is love and abounding in goodness desired to bruise His own son as part of His plan to reach out to those who were lost. However, bruising those He loves does not mean abandoning them. In Jesus' bruised state, He was asking the Father where was the Father's help - not where was the Father's presence.

## Point 10

Did the Father help Jesus?

Further along in Psalm 22, the fact that the Father was present is stated quite clearly. Psalm 22:21-24 says:

"...You have answered Me. ... praise Him!... For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from Him; But when He cried to Him, He heard."

The scripture says right here that the Father did not hide His face from Jesus and He heard His cry.

## Point 11

Understanding that the Father did not abandon Jesus on the cross is consistent with understanding the oneness of God. God can never be separated.

Mark 12:29 "Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one....'"

1 Corinthians 8:4 "...there is no other God but one."

God the Father can not be separated from God the Son. God is one.

## Point 12

When one does God's will, God will never abandon them. The following are Jesus' words stating exactly this: the Father did not leave Jesus because Jesus was obeying God.

John 8:28-29 "Then Jesus said to them, 'When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.'"

When we do the things that please God, the Father will never leave us by ourselves (Psalm 22:21-24, the Father heard and answered Jesus' cry)! In fact, the Father not only does not leave us, He blesses us on top of that. Apostle Paul says this of Jesus:

Philippians 2:8-9 "He [Jesus] humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name".

1 Samuel 2:30 "...the LORD says: 'those who honor Me I will honor'", not abandon.

## Conclusion

If you had been taught that Jesus was alone, I appreciate that it may be hard to change your mind instantly. As you consider the thought, though, I suggest trying to find one other Bible verse that says that Jesus was abandoned on the cross. I believe that you will find there is no such verse. In comparison, consider the number of verses noted above. In particular, note that Jesus Himself said that He would not be left alone and David prophetically said that God the Father did not hide His face from Jesus.

The sacrifice for sin is a holy offering in front of God (Lev.17:3-5). So, in Jesus' sacrificial death, Jesus was in the presence of the holy Father.

Per Psalm 22:1, Jesus' cry "why have You forsaken Me" did not mean "where are You" but rather "where is Your help". God sacrifices those He loves for those who are lost, yet even in the midst of the extreme pain, God hears the cry of the afflicted and helps them. (Psalm 22:21-24)